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ABSTRACT

A combination of behavioral and motivational theory is proposed to deal with the problem of violence in schools. Characteristics of persons effective in dealing with violent or aggressive students include intelligence, positive attitudes toward students, and high expectations for students. Other personal qualities that are related in general to effective interpersonal relationships and to successful teaching include cognitive flexibility; the ability to accommodate values, insights, feelings, and perceptions different from one's own; and the ability to experience and interact comfortably with others who are different. Teachers with these qualities can restructure student behavior through discipline. The motivational behavioral approach emphasizes guidance without domination and freedom without laxity. It stresses understanding the underlying causes of disruptive behavior and its possible precipitators, and recommends the development of a large repertoire of interventions. A list of guidelines for establishing discipline standards is provided. Contains 15 references. (JDD)

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# A Motivational Behavioral Approach To Violence In School

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In 1940 the top seven discipline problems facing American education were: talking; chewing gum; making noise; running in the hall; getting out of turn in line; wearing improper clothing; and not putting paper in wastebaskets. A sharp contrast to these is presented by the most serious problems listed in a survey in 1982: rape; robbery; assault; burglary; arson; murder; extortion; and gang warfare. It is obvious to any observer that the methods that were effective with the first set of problems will not be adequate to deal effectively with the second group of problems. As a practitioner I have effectively used a combination of behavioral and motivational theory. For sake of reference within the confines of this paper I have labeled this a behavioral motivational approach to violence in school.

What makes one person more effective than another in dealing with violent or aggressive students? Is there any consensus in research findings that support any particular position? There are three major ideas that repeatedly emerge as critical. First, students want intelligent teachers and respect a teacher more when they

feel that he or she is intelligent(Milgram, 1979). Second, the personal characteristics of teachers are more important than their theoretical orientation. Koskenniemi(1977) found that the key factor in successful instruction was the personality of the teacher rather than the subject matter. Third, it has been found that perceived learner characteristics and teacher expectations are directly interrelated; and that the teacher's attitudes and expectations in turn influence performance(Sutherland & Algozzine, 1979). It is generally agreed that, in the classroom, the teacher's expectations are translated into actual behavior that will communicate these expectations to the pupil and will shape his behavior toward expected patterns(Jeter, 1975). These patterns in turn reinforce the teacher's perceptions of and expectations for a student. This whole process is cyclical.

In Pygmalion in the Classroom, Rosenthal and Jacobson(1968) found that one person's prophecy of another can come to determine performance. This is called the self-fulfilling prophecy; a person will tend to act to the other person's expectations, whether they are positive or negative. Foster, Schmidt and Sabatino(1976) found that being labeled as learning disabled generated negative expectancies. Even such basic attributes as physical attractiveness have been found to influence teacher expectations. Salvia,

Algozzine, and Sheare(1977) report significantly higher report card and achievement test scores for physically attractive students, and they conclude that teacher bias is partly responsible for this. It can be argued that teacher's expectations clearly influence student performance. The implications for application of this principle to the violent student are obvious. The effective teacher must have realistic but high expectations for the student.

Some specific personal qualities have been shown to be related in general to effective interpersonal relationships and to successful teaching. The frame of reference through which we perceive the world and its inhabitants is relative to our awareness of the world around us. We hear, speak, touch, see and experience with reference to points against which we measure our sensory and emotional stimulation. The more flexible we are in altering our frame of reference to suit the needs and criteria of situations the more likely that we will be able to understand change that is not compatible with our reference points. We must be able to accommodate values, insights, feeling and perceptions that are different from our own and experience and interact comfortably with others who are physically, sensorially, socially or emotionally different. Our frame of reference must not be limited by set expectations. We must have the ability to be

nonjudgemental. This does not mean that one has no personal values; quite the contrary, the teacher should have a well-defined and meaningful sense of values with which they feel comfortable. The quality of being nonjudgemental means one can be accepting of a wide range of students whose values, beliefs and perceptions differ markedly from their own.

Cognitive flexibility refers to the ability to act and think simultaneously and appropriately given the dimensions of the situation while resisting premature closure(Whitely,Sprinthall, Mosher, & Donaghy, 1967). The person who is effective in dealing with the violent child must be able to understand the subtlety and context of what the student is communicating. When a teacher is better able to control emotional involvement in what is happening, they increase the potential for relating to the learner on a level that is beneficial to growth. Genuineness or acting without a facade is the appropriate sharing of oneself with another.

Positive regard is essential in working with violent students. Positive regard is not a technique but should be a sincere genuine feeling of affection for another person. This is most often communicated through unspoken communications. It makes the other person more secure , more worthwhile as a person, more willing to grow and change. Before one person can attempt to understand another they should have an objective

understanding of themselves. The therapeutic teacher must at times place many personal feelings aside; this person has enough confidence in themselves, enough belief in what they are doing, enough security that they do not retreat in the face of adversity or retreat in the heat of anger.

Upon completion of this self analysis and with a positive motivational attitude the therapeutic teacher is now ready to begin the process involved in the restructuring of behavior. the term discipline has taken on the connotations of punishment. In reality discipline is not synonomous with punishment but, if properly used can be a constructive tool in the classroom. Discipline is an extension of an adult's concern for a child's welfare. Discipline is the limits set for a child so that he knows what's acceptable and what's not acceptable(Holt, Ginott, Salk, and Barr, 1972). This definition views punishment in one of its more positive facets. Ginott defined discipline as finding acceptable alternatives to punishment. He continued pointing out that when a child is punished they become enraged causing hate and making the child uneducable, unreachable and unteachable. Donald Barr emphasized a different aspect of the disciplinary process: conscience. Holt states, "It is not what we tell people but how we treat them(Holt, Ginott, Salk, and Barr, 1972)." The child who is treated in a manner that reflects order, discipline

and logical responses to situations will be more likely to behave in such a way.

Bossone(1964), for example,defines discipline as the training in self-control and orderly social conduct brought about by effective desirable classroom management. Discipline when properly used does not restrain natural curiosity and spontaneity. Pickering(1972) puts forth the same type of argument by saying good programs will be structured sufficiently to enable the child to learn and to value social behaviors while fostering individual responsibility. Well-rounded programs will foster attitudes and behaviors that promote the ability to discipline oneself.

As the teacher uses discipline constructively, the student learns from the discipline, behaviors that are socially productive and compatible with his own beliefs. Discipline should be a part of the total educational program. The motivational behavioral approach provides guidance without domination and freedom without laxity. Discipline is regarded as a learning tool. Recognition of the constructive value of discipline impels us to find ways of making discipline more relevant and positive. Purkey and Avila(1971)point out that the teacher's beliefs about the student play an important part in determining the student's conduct. conduct problems of this variety can be alleviated through the teacher doing a self-evaluation and coming to terms with their

beliefs. Ediger(1973) suggests a number of steps to lessen the problems in a specific classroom: examining lessons(to ensure that the teacher's expectations are in line with the student's abilities), providing stimulating lessons, keeping record of the student's progress and positively reinforcement of student achievement. If the teacher is experiencing serious problems often neglect in one of these areas is at the root of the problem.

Before acting as disciplinarian, the teacher should be sure that they understand the cause or origin of the problem. It is never sufficient to suppress disruptive behavior before it is understood. The teacher needs to pay particular attention to the environment for possible causes or precipitators of disruptive behavior. Kaplan(1973) makes the point that behavior problems in the classroom often involve student interaction and that to decrease problems it is necessary to recognize and understand this interaction. It is critical to get to the root of the problem not just treat the superficial symptoms.

The use of an appropriate intervention depends upon the situation, the student and the teacher's repertoire. The well-rounded teacher who recognizes the importance of educating the whole person will develop a large repertoire of interventions that will be appropriate for the largest number of learners in the majority of situations. The therapeutic teacher

recognizes the student as a whole person. Carkhuff and Berenson(1967) define the whole person as one who is comprised of actions fully integrating his emotional, intellectual and physical resources in such a way as to lead to greater and greater self-determination. The whole person integrates his emotional, intellectual and physical attributes in a productive way. What this means in practice is that if the teacher emphasizes subject matter to the exclusion of personal growth, or behavioral techniques to the exclusion of psychodynamic principles they are failing to deal with the whole person.

Any given intervention, although effective in some circumstances may be ineffective in other circumstances. Palardy(1970) cites weaknesses in behavioral interventions and stresses the need to instill self-discipline in students. I have personally found the following list to be quite helpful in establishing discipline standards with violent students.

1. Set your standards early.
2. Teach a varied, interesting lesson.
3. Let the students know that you respect them as students.
4. Be poised, firm and fair.
5. Teach to the positive. NOTHING SUCCEEDS LIKE SUCCESS.

6. Make discipline quick, consistent, just and inevitable. MAKE THE STUDENT RESPONSIBLE FOR THEIR OWN ACTIONS.
7. Do not group punish.
8. DON'T ARGUE OR HUMILIATE STUDENTS.
9. Don't threaten the pupil with their grades.
10. Know the background of each child.
11. Document any problems thoroughly.
12. Cultivate your own techniques of discipline.
13. Don't assign extra homework as a punishment.
14. KNOW YOURSELF. IF YOU LOVE TEACHING YOUR STUDENTS WILL GAIN A LOVE OF LEARNING.

No one method works in all circumstances. The wise teacher will be able to analyze and evaluate each individual student that is experiencing difficulty and personalize an individual program to remediate the problem. Flexibility and creativity are necessary to be effective in dealing with the problem of violence in the schools.

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